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ABSTRACT

Male teachers constitute only 12 percent of the elementary teaching workforce. This low number persists despite nearly a century of work to increase their numbers. This paper outlines various hypotheses generated from collaborative interviews with 15 Iowa elementary teachers. Section 1 examines the assumed advantage men have in affirmative hiring, which the interviews indicate is self-limiting and can create several disadvantages. Section 2 explores men's experiences of conflict in the gendered power structure of elementary schools, highlighting gender conflict with male principals and conflict with female co-workers. All of the men in the study described their own resistance to women's work. They resisted de-skilling and asserted independent judgment; were scornful of rationalization and top-down prescribed curricula; and were impatient with intensification, which they felt distracted from and displaced the school's true goal of focusing on the big picture. In resisting these aspects of women's work, male teachers experienced conflict with veteran and nominally successful women teachers, who had accepted and internalized the institutional definition of teaching as professional behavior. The need to get along with women colleagues and challenges to men's legitimacy as elementary teachers were felt acutely by men because of their small numbers and social isolation within the school. Being the first or the only man, though it carried advantages, isolated men as tokens. (Contains 21 references.) (SM)

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The Persistent Fewness of Men Elementary Teachers: Hypotheses from Their Experiences

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The Persistent Fewness of Men Elementary Teachers: Hypotheses from their experiences

(Paper given at the annual meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society, 1997)

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Introduction

The hierarchical division of labor by gender in education is clear and persistent, the majority of elementary and secondary teachers being women, and administrators, men. Within the teaching force itself, the distribution of men and women varies by grade level, content area, non-academic functions, and type of student taught. Considerable research has contributed to our understanding of the historical and cultural causes of the process by which teaching became a "gendered occupation" (Apple, 1986; Bergen, 1982; Richardson and Hatcher, 1983; Strober and Tyack, 1980).

Attention has focused on the preponderance of men in educational administration and the need to open these positions of school leadership to women. Less attention focuses on the relatively small but significant number of male teachers, who constitute thirty per cent of the total teaching workforce and only twelve per cent at the elementary level.

Men currently are a minority among all schoolteachers of kindergarten through twelfth grade in the United States. While women account for seventy percent of all schoolteachers nationally, gender disproportions are even more striking at the elementary level, where men currently comprise only twelve percent of the work force. Furthermore, within the K - 6 grade sequence, most men teach in the upper elementary grades, or work across grades in the art, music, and physical education content areas. Men in the primary grades (K - 3) are rare indeed, perhaps no more than one in five of the twelve percent total who are men. (Annual Estimates of School Statistics, 1991/2).

The fewness of men elementary teachers persists despite nearly a hundred year campaign to increase their numbers. An irony of the historical entry and numerical domination of teaching by women at the turn of the twentieth century was the nearly simultaneous blaming of this preponderance of women in the lives of young boys for dysfunctions and loss of hearty independence in the lives of adult men. Women's unalloyed influence in elementary

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schools was alleged to constitute a "woman peril" in the early years of the twentieth century (Kimmel, 1987).

The "woman peril" also resulted in calls to counteract the preponderant influence of women in young boys' schooling by recruiting more men into the profession (Chadwick, 1914; Runyon, 1914). Phi Delta Kappa magazine hopefully asserted in a series of articles that "teaching children is man's work." As Joseph H. Pleck has illustrated:

> Women's influence on boys' and men's difficulties in their role came to be formulated in terms of "feminization." Articles with titles like "The Effeminization of Men" appeared in popular magazines as early as 1893. In 1909, the prominent psychologist J. McKeen Cattell argued that the new confinement of the boy in elementary schools exposed him to the ministrations of a "vast horde of female teachers" who tended to "subvert both the school and the family" because of their spinsterish attitudes (Pleck, 1987, 23).

The need for more male elementary teachers was given renewed public attention by Sexton (1970) who argued that various dysfunctions and deviance in adult American males could be traced to their early experiences in feminized classrooms. Calls for increased numbers of men teaching young children continue at the present, most often expressed as a need for "male role models" in the lives of young boys, particularly those boys in separated families, lacking regular contact with fathers.

In spite of this campaign to increase men's numbers in elementary teaching, the proportion of men remains small and is actually declining. What can explain the persistent fewness of men elementary teachers in the face of public expressions of concern and support for affirmative hiring? Recent research has begun to offer insights into this contradiction. Conflict between traditional concepts of masculinity and an occupation still seen as "women's work" may deter some men who otherwise would find satisfaction in working with children (Williams, 1992; Gerson, 1993; Allan, 1993, 1994; Kimmel and Messner, 1995). Men typically discover elementary teaching as a career late, relative to women, and do not have role models of men teachers from their own elementary school experiences. (Montecinos and Nielson, 1997; De Corse and Vogtle, 1997). Men may enjoy advantages in hiring because of their gender, and they are privileged in promotion to school administration, a "glass escalator" effect (Williams, 1992). Thus current research is

beginning to uncover limits to men's entry and persistence in elementary teaching, as well as factors that draw them from teaching, thus maintaining their relative fewness. In what follows, I outline additional hypotheses generated from extended collaborative interviews with fifteen elementary teachers in Iowa. I look first at the assumed advantage men have in affirmative hiring. I then explore men's experience of conflict in the gendered power structure of elementary schools.

Affirmative hiring of token males

An important theme which recurred in men's accounts of their lives as elementary teachers was a perception of men's initial advantage in getting hired in elementary schools. Consistent with what they had been told in college, most men discovered this perception of men's special opportunity in statements by childrens' parents and others outside the school, in attitudes of women colleagues, and in their own experiences in job interviews. Yet the possibility of advantage for men in hiring is contradicted by their fewness relative to women in the ranks of elementary teachers, assuming sufficient applicants. Men's accounts of the circumstances under which they believe themselves to have been hired offer possible hypotheses to expain this contradiction. From an analysis of their recollections of hiring transactions emerge insights that may partly explain the fewness of men elementary teachers, real or perceived advantages notwithstanding.

To some extent, most men revealed that they felt they had benefitted personally from advantage. On the other hand, several men felt that the perception of advantage was illusory, based on their realization that few other new men after them had, in fact, been hired, even when applicants were available. They were puzzled by their own advantage and yet the fewness of other males being hired. After years of teaching, they saw no increase in the proportion of men among women elementary teachers. They were consequently ambivalent as to whether gender advantage in hiring was real or illusory.

Whether or not the advantage was real, its perception set up obligations which men sensed, both to be loyal to the male principals who by and large hired them, and also to prove themselves worthy to their women colleagues who, they sensed, equated advantage with unearned gender favoritism. In either case, the perception of advantage entailed disadvantages.

First, their fewness, or more often total absence, in particular schools, offered hiring advantages for single individuals. Schools and principals wanted one male or a small minority of male teachers. Advantage rapidly decreased, however, when one or two men were hired. Fewness, an initial hiring advantage, became the isolation of "tokens" or gender minorities on the job. This may partly explain men's uncertainty as to whether preference was real or illusory. "Hiring one," or hiring one or two, or hiring "a" male -- these phrases, used by men in recollecting their own hiring, inadvertently signal a special kind of affirmative hiring. "Gender balance" actually meant equalling out proportions of men and women teachers "a little bit." Men did not mention perceiving a need on the part of employers actually to equalize proportions of men and women teaching at the elementary level. A single male or at most "a few" satisfied district requirements. An effect of this may be that any advantage for the first man hired at a particular school declines immediately for men subsequently seeking employment. The result is many men having had the experience of being the only male teacher in a school, or one of two or three, with consequent isolation or token status.

Nor did the gender of the hiring principal seem to make a difference in this reason for hiring men. Tom explained this: "One woman principal I interviewed with, she wanted to have at least a male in each, you know, each upper grade level."

"They were looking for a male;" "they were looking for a man because they didn't have any:" clearly these men felt they had benefitted from hiring policies influenced by gender. But their statements imply that in most cases one "specimen" would do. Schools recruited one male teacher at a particular grade level, or one among an otherwise all-female faculty. After one was hired, any initial gender advantage declined for subsequent male applicants. The hiring policy revealed here results in men's isolation and high visibility in the social life of the schools. In addition, the ease of their hiring and the lack of interviewers' attention to other qualifications reasonably and directly related to the work of teaching children encourage men from the outset to see their gender itself as an important aspect of the work: they infer that that is what, to some extent they were hired for. They relate this to a vague but important need for "male role models."

> Q: Do you sense that others, particularly parents and perhaps some administrators expect you to do something called male role modelling?

> A: Yeah. And I don't think those parents or administrators have a clear view of what they want. Their perceptions are: "We've had a traditional family organization pattern that looks like this [two parents]. We don't have that anymore, but we should still have that. Talking about children born into a single parent family, they're more likely to have emotional adjustment problems. . . discipline problems at school. A lot of those things. And I think this is one thing a principal can try to have control over. "Well, I can hire a male. I can't do much else. But perhaps hire a male and maybe that will magically help elevate theings" (Steve, talented and gifted program teacher).

Male role modelling is an important part of the work. It is also perceived as work that "a" single male or a few can perform in an otherwise all-female faculty.

Advantage for the first one or two men hired was self limiting and diminished for other men who later applied. This realization led some men to conclude that preference in hiring was in fact illusory. These men suggested that the perception of men's advantage was real, but was contradicted by the fewness of men actually being hired. Dean, a seventeen year veteran teacher, widely involved in curriculum development and union negotiations saw this clearly.

> Q: I hear that administrators are looking for men elementary teachers. Do you perceive that?
>
> A: I haven't. Maybe in general, I don't know. But I don't see that happening in this district. At least in the buildings where I've taught, the number of men has dwindled rather than increased. . . . I don't know how many have applied, but I don't see very many getting hired. . . . There have been men substitute teachers that have done excellent jobs of coming into buildings and teaching off and on for years and years and years, that wanted to get a secure full-time position, that were never hired.

Mark, a sixth grade teacher for five years in a small urban district, noticed the same contradiction between the perception of advantage and actual hiring practices.

Q: What advantages do men currently have in the elementary job market?

A: Actually, what I was going to say is, it's curious because I've been watching since I've been hired how many other men they hire, and in this school district they don't hire very many men. In fact, I'm sort of concerned about it, because I can only think of two men they've hired in the district [to teach elementary] in the last five years. [After I was hired,] I think it's sort of been reversed. I don't think men have an advantage, at least here, although I'd like to think they do.

Q: Do you think there's a perception among elementary teachers that men have an advantage in this job market now?

A: Yeah. But it's women who think that way.

Q: But it's not your experience that they do?

A: No! Not now. . . . They always think that the districts are looking for men. There's that perception. But I don't find it to be true. It's a commonly held attitude among elementary teachers, women teachers, that they need more men in elementary schools, that men have the hiring advantage, but the statistics don't bear that out.

Q: Why do you think they're not hiring more men?

A: I don't know. I really don't. A lot of men come through my practicum program, about fifty-fifty men and women. There's enough applicants. I don't know. It would be a curious answer.

Several possible explanations emerge to explain the contradiction between these men's sense of advantage in getting hired themselves and the persistent fewness of other men being hired. Gender balance in an age of affirmative action and equity may be served by hiring a single representative of the minority group. Principals' need for male allies and supporters may be satisfied by a few men. One or two male teachers, especially in the upper elementary grades may suffice to take on for all children in the school the duty of "male role modelling." Finally, there is the possibility, to which I now turn, that, need for allies notwithstanding,

some male principals are at least ambivalent about, if not tacitly opposed to hiring men to teach in their schools. In these cases, men may have been hired to meet district level rather than elementary school needs, or as a result of pressure from parents and others outside the school. Indeed, some men elementary teachers interviewed sensed that their male principals perceived them as disruptive of the school's social order, as potential rivals for power, or threats to their control.

"Neither rooster nor hen:" Gender conflict with male principals

Interviews with men elementary teachers revealed a conflicted political landscape of supervisors versus subordinates, men versus women, and the few versus the many. Men elementary teachers find themselves gender anomalies, vulnerable, and needing to negotiate a career course between alliance with principals, based on shared gender, or alliance with women colleagues, based on shared position, experiences, and desire for respect and autonomy. As anomalies, men elementary teachers experience and must resolve conflict both with principals and with women teachers, conflict inherent in the situation, that unresolved may result in men either leaving teaching voluntarily or being terminated. They negotiate a place in what David Tyack has called a "pedagogical harem." I suggest that these conflicts involving the "gender politics" of elementary schools may be an additional hypothesis to account for the persistent fewness of men in elementary teaching.

Analysis of men's experiences in getting hired revealed that male principals, influenced by parent and public opinion, hired men as tokens (signaling at least minimal attention to gender balance among teachers), as "role models," as needed coaches, and as allies and friends in otherwise all female institutions. Beneath these reasons to hire men, however, men's comments revealed some principals' ambivalence and even opposition to hiring them as teachers. The bond of gender felt by men teachers, was strained by required loyalty, deference, and subordination. For principals, friendship and gender alliance was strained by fear of rivalry and challenge.

Men elementary teachers' descriptions of their relationships with men principals suggest that <u>some</u> formed alliances based on shared interests, experiences, and outlooks as men. Alliance meant privilege in access and autonomy for these male teachers. Friendship and companionship were built on mutual respect and trust, as well as

teachers' deference and moderation. Both male teachers and male principals needed to accommodate themselves to the collective majority of women.

But not all men described their relationships with principals as a source of privilege or alliance. Indeed, a majority of those interviewed described more conflicted relationships involving suspicion, mutual hostility, rivalry, and distrust. These relationships, too, reflected shared gender as a key component. Men who emphasized conflict with male principals recounted how principals acceded only reluctantly to public calls for increased participation of men in elementary teaching, perceiving in men teachers potential challenges to stable authority and control, perceiving them as renegades and male rivals in "the pedagogical harem." What autonomy these men experienced was gained, they explained, only through struggle and confrontation. In this process, these men at times perceived themselves in positions similar to women's, needing to join them in their status as subordinates, resentful of lack of respect for their independence and professional judgment. Instead of friendship and trust, these men expressed anger at what they perceived as illegitimate degrees of control of their work, petty supervision, indeed an awareness of a common experience they shared with their women colleagues.

> Q: What do you think the principal is thinking, if he finds men a threat to his authority, but he has to hire them, and he <u>is</u> hiring them?
>
> A: Well, I think it's the same way that you hire blacks. You don't have a choice. You have to hire them because of affirmative action, or it's just politically the correct thing to do. You can't avoid it. You have to do it.
>
> Q: What kind of a man would your principal prefer to hire?
>
> A: Someone who doesn't question his authority, even in private. . . . Power is an issue. . . . (Curt, eleven year veteran elementary teacher with no coaching experience).

David, a teacher for six years in third and fourth grade, who had not had coaching experience, agreed that men were apt to challenge authority when it conflicted with their professional judgment:

> I do have the sense that men, if there were more men in the profession, that principals would not be able to get by with as much as they do now. In quite a few ways, you know. I think men, if there were more of them, they wouldn't put up with as much shit.
>
> Q. They'd be more confrontive?
>
> A. More confrontive, yes. You know, things would just get talked out more, you know, they'd insist. No, obviously that wouldn't be true in all settings at all times. But I think in general it would be true. In our staff meetings, there would be quite a few times when, you know, when I would say something that nobody else would have said.

Curt, a forty-one year old teacher, with fifteen years of experience teaching explained his experience of gendered power in elementary schools with a metaphor parallel to Tyack's: the male principal as a "rooster in a henhouse," and men teachers negotiating being neither "rooster" nor "hen."

> Generally the principals I have worked with, well, they all have been male except one. The women didn't really do this sort of behavior. But I think some men who become principals get into it because they want the authority and the power and the privilege of dominating other people. . . . It's more of a power issue. So what I've seen go on is the "rooster in the hen house" sort of thing where you have the one special male and a collection of women. And even if the teachers are men, they are treated like women. . . .[Have you had other experiences that would add to my understanding of this?] Right. Whenever I question this principal or, I'm thinking of another male principal, at a staff meeting, there would never be agreement. Whatever I would say would be viewed as a disagreement or a threat. Whereas a woman could get away with it. With some of the principals there is never the freedom to question their judgment in public. . . .[Do you think other men also perceive this about principals as "rooster in the hen house?"] Definitely! Absolutely. I don't know how they would word it, but they would work around to it. . . .

I asked Doug, a sixteen year veteran teacher to comment on Curt's analogy:

> Q. One man that I spoke with, who had been an elementary teacher for some time, said he wanted to hear what other men would respond to what he called "the rooster in the henhouse phenomenon." What I think he meant by that was how other men would deal with a situation where there was a principal who was a man and all the other teachers were women. And the guy felt that he was being treated like a woman, that he found himself in a difficult situation. Can you make sense out of that, do you understand how that might occur?
>
> A Yeah, I can. I know for a fact that there are some principals, and I'm not saying that they're from _____, but I know of some that feel that the teaching staff--they're women--and they need to have a man in charge. Principals like that might look at other men on the staff as, maybe, being the type of people that need to have somebody tell them what to do, and therefore they treat them the same way they treat the women that they feel need to be managed, or told what to do or directed.

In the above explanations, female teachers are preferred by male principals because they are supposedly more docile and tractable than men. Male teachers, in these cases, can represent a threat to the authority of the male principal, especially if they ally themselves with their female colleagues. Terry, a fifth grade teacher with seven years of experience, after one year at a new school where he is the only male, concurred:

> On all-school policy issues . . . I think my principals expected teachers to just accept the announced policy and go along, don't expect teachers as a matter of course to engage in debate. I think it's very much my business and something I should have input on. This causes more conflict for me than some women teachers, because they're more apt not to speak up, even though they too may disagree. . . . My women colleagues were intimidated, I think, and I was supposed to be too. There was a lot of discontent in the staff. But I was the only one to speak out. I spoke out as a professional, but I got a lot of resistance.

Thus, being male is a potential source of simultaneous advantage and disadvantage within the gendered structure of power in elementary schools. Assumptions of men's advantage in hiring

and persisting as elementary teachers need to be balanced by an awareness of the complexity of gender relationships in this school setting. Men elementary teachers, in forming alliances either with male principals or female colleagues, present an implicit challenge to institutionalized relationships between men and women. Men perceived themselves surrounded by conflict in structures of authority and control. Gender alliances with male administrators were offset by challenges to men's legitimacy as teachers, posed by women, who as a majority defined work norms and to some extent controlled men's ability to succeed and continue. On the other hand, men's discovery of and resistance to "women's work," as low-status, rationalized, and "de-skilled" labor put them in conflict with other men who were administrators. Participants in this study revealed that both conflicts in the gendered structure of school authority and control were for them sources of frustration. In some cases, men had observed other men teachers, unsuccessful in negotiating these conflicts, who had been pushed out of teaching or let go.

Gender conflict with women colleagues

While men elementary teachers share gender in common but differ positionally in their relationships with most principals, they share position but differ in gender in their relations with women colleagues. Like principals, women teachers assert control over the work of men elementary teachers. This control is based on the power of women's relative numbers, their seniority, and cultural traditions of their especial suitability in working with children. Men elementary teachers perceived women as "gatekeepers," whose approval and cooperation were essential to their survival on the job.

"Getting along" with women teachers and securing their cooperation men saw as crucial. Some men suggested generational differences among women as an important variable in their relationships and degree of conflict. While a few men recalled experienced women teachers "mentoring" them, most described conflict and women's resistance needing to be worked through. In experiencing conflict with women, men felt vulnerable, because they were often isolated, the token male, or one of two or three. They experienced conflict based on three broad principles: gender prejudice and generalized suspicion of their motivations and fitness; gendered interactional and communication styles; and differing definitions of the work of teaching itself. They experienced or observed women's collective power over men teachers: women's complaints to principals carried weight; they controled informal

networks and the flow of essential information; and they could isolate men within the school and withhold cooperation.

When asked what was important in a man's success as an elementary teacher, several men responded: "getting along," especially with women co-workers. I asked Phil what advice he would give a man just beginning his career in elementary teaching.

> Q: Are there are any things that you could tell a man who was going into teaching -- don't do this or do that?
>
> A: I guess just get along as well as you can with your staff. [Another man who was not rehired] did not get along with the women on the staff -- some of them. No, I don't know what he did to them, if he thought he was, you know, if he was a chauvinist or whatever, but there were a lot of women teachers that did not like him, and I guess just getting along as best you can with your staff is, you know, the best advice I can give.

Terry, a fifth grade teacher, asserted that the "biggest challenge" for him in getting started was "trying to relate to the women I was teaching with." I asked Curt how important it was to get along with women colleagues. He replied:

> If you are going to survive in grade school, yeah, nobody ever talks about that. I don't think from what I've ever heard anybody acknowledges to undergrads that this sort of thing exists.

Richard put "ability to get along with the other teachers," as a most important key to survival: "That's a big item. You've got to be willing, as a rookie teacher to take your place and follow suit."

A sense of being challenged not so much by the work itself as by women colleagues was a recurrent theme in their reflections. They felt singled out and subject to greater scrutiny than either other teachers or than they were used to in other work settings. Getting along meant consciously adapting to the norms defined by women's majority. Most men were surprised that relations with women co-workers were at issue, never having been challenged on their sociability. Several men expressed an awareness of this being their first life experience as "a minority," needing to "fit in." What to them were "normal" male behaviors were challenged.

Q: How about dealing with women colleagues too? I wondered whether someone wanting to be supermacho in order to avoid effeminacy would not also screw up their cooperative relationships with women?

A: Exactly. Because elementary teachers as teachers are keenly aware of how people are presenting themselves. They read people for a living and would not react favorably to someone who came in like that. I think that even if you were an incredibly macho kind of person, rather than continue to force your female colleagues to adapt to it, you're going to be much more likely the one not to force yourself into those situations. You are one and they are many. I think it's much more likely the male teacher will have to adapt.

Curt summed up the sense of challenge that he and other men inferred from women colleagues.

Q: What do they suspect you of? What do you have to prove to them?

A: You're not making enough money for one thing. You know men are supposed to make more money. You don't know how to interact with people well enough to be teaching at the grade school level. You don't have people's emotional needs up front as your consideration. (Which is generally true of most men. You don't. But I think you still can be a decent teacher.) You don't have enough rapport with parents, I think is often an attitude. You really don't have the people skills to be working at the elementary level, which is really just the reverse of why women are suspect at the university level. "You aren't smart enough."

A few of the men interviewed expressed special gratitude for their experience of having been mentored by women teachers. They were aware not only of how mentoring had helped them "learn the ropes," but also how individual women's "sponsorship" had eased their entry into the social life of the workplace and had legitimated them. Each of these men recalled a single woman colleague, usually older and respected in the school, who had advised them, praised them, nurtured their self-esteem, and who had been advocates for them among other women teachers. This "seal of approval" granted

by a senior woman teacher made "getting along" less of a personal challenge.

But several men were surprised to discover women colleagues who objected on principle to their employment in elementary school. These men felt that they had been prejudged and "stereotyped," that they had begun work with a negative impression to be disproved. When they succeeded in proving themselves, they gained acceptance as "exceptions." This led some men to compare their experiences with those of other minorities and of women themselves seeking equity in employment.

Ross, a thirteen year veteran teacher, one of two men working with twenty women teachers, had vivid memories of this "prejudice."

> Q: So, come back to the idea of challenge, what went on in your mind when you said, "This is going to be a challenge."?
>
> A: The main challenge was to just overcome some of the prejudices and things like this. Also, it was just a challenge because I knew that I'd be good at it. The challenge was to prove to the people that didn't think I could do it, I mean, there were a lot of women that I've had contact with, that do not see a place for men in elementary. I've had a number of contacts with that. And so I wanted to prove them wrong. That's the type of challenge I was involved with. The other challenge is just to see if every day, when I get up, I look forward to it as much as I did thirteen years ago. That's important.

Ross recalled his experiences during his first years at his current school. He sensed an implied disapproval by some women teachers, to which he responded as to a personal test of character. He recalled one colleague in particular.

> Well, when I look back at that first year, I remember that she would rarely talk to me. And I remember that I was talking to her and always just chatting at her, and I just <u>know</u> that there were times when she was just sitting back and listening to me and just kind of judging me. When I look back at it, I never noticed any open prejudice, but I <u>felt</u> like it was there.
>
> I always told people, "I'm experiencing reverse prejudice," you know, where women at that time were

> demanding women's rights, I felt I was being denied rights to be in a field that is basically dominated by women. And I loved it, I mean, I loved to prove them wrong, and win them over.

Pressed to fill in details of how he experienced this "prejudice," Ross remembered a party he had attended at the end of his first year teaching at his present school. In casual conversation with a woman sixth grade teacher, he was able to confirm what he had previously infered.

> She finally just said, "You know, I do not believe in men in the elementary ed system." She goes, "I truly just . . . I see no purpose for men in elementary." And, I was offended at that point. Then she goes, "But," she goes, "you've been able", she goes, "I'm impressed. I've got to say you're an exception."
>
> Now I was both pleased to hear that comment, and complemented by it. But I also was offended that she had stereotyped, that she didn't feel men should be in that realm of teaching. She truly did not feel there was a place for men in elementary education.

Phil, a sixth grade science teacher and coach of several high school team sports, sensed that some women colleagues' assumptions about coaching were incompatible with what they believed elementary teaching required. Furthermore, he felt, they questioned his underlying motivation to teach.

> I think of a lot of them have the misconception that we're just in it to be in it, that we don't really want to be, but I want to be in teaching myself. You know, when I leave to go coaching right after school, a half hour before all the other teachers can leave, you know, I hear some comments about that sometimes, you know, "coaches shouldn't be teachers" and things like that, or at least elementary teachers.

Each of these men experienced challenges to their work based on women colleagues' prejudgments about the appropriateness of men, on principle, being elementary teachers.

Several of the men interviewed identified styles of interaction and communication as being a source of conflict with women

colleagues. They were made to realize that ways of interacting that they had considered normal were perceived by their women colleagues as abrasive, aggressive, or rude. In addition, some men came to an awareness of territoriality or "personal space," and that their behaviors seemed invasive to women colleagues. Men found it necessary to consciously change to meet women's expectations and social norms. Some men experienced this simply as an awareness of the qualities of their voices, louder and more animated than were women's. To others, it meant alleged characteristic differences of men and women in styles of discussion and group problem solving. Curt developed this idea in describing what he perceived as his different approach to participation in group meetings.

> I was the only man in the building. It really makes a big difference in terms of staff meetings. A lot of times I would say something and [my women colleagues] would think it outrageous without me meaning to be outrageous. I've seen other men do this. Just because we come at issues and we say what we want to say, and then you can love it or leave it, but we've said what is important to us. And women, generally, work it around so that no one is offended. I think grade school women especially are that way. There is something about becoming a grade school teacher in the first place. Generally you just are not an "offensive" person. And if you are, your edges get ground off.
>
> Q: Go back to being ignored or saying something outrageous. I want to understand what each of those means. Can you give me an example of each?
>
> A: Men in group meetings tend to challenge each other more than women do, so that, and I saw this at a junior high meeting that I was at, that people argued openly and it was acceptable. Nobody thought it was weird. There was just an open argument. I mean a disagreement where people really were disagreeing and saying things that I have never heard at an elementary staff meeting. Because in elementary people are just "nicer," and they don't want any open confrontation. . . . I think there is more of a co-worker attitude with men. We can scream and yell and fight and argue, and then our lives still go on. It makes no difference, because we know in another week there will be some other thing to disagree on, and life still goes

> on. Whereas the women just seem easily offended and hurt, and carry it deeper.

"Your edges get ground off." Men must adapt to women's ways of communicating in order to get along in the workplace.

In addition to styles of communication, some men described conflict arising from men's and women's differing territorial assumptions about their roles in elementary schools: differently defined spheres of responsibility. Men perceived women as more devoted to and even possessive of "their" children and classrooms. Men typically expressed a sense of a more diffuse responsibility throughout the school. These different definitions of spheres of responsibility were a source of misunderstanding and conflict. Curt recalled an experience that made him aware of this.

> This year, in order to get to my classroom I can either go down the hallway and unlock my door. Which I always have to unlock it because it is locked. I am inevitably carrying a bunch of junk, and I've got to put it all down and fiddle around. Or I can walk through someone else's room to get to my room. I did the walk-through several times, and then I realized it was really irritating this other teacher to have me walk through her room in the morning. I don't know why, and I've never said to her "I know this is irritating you but I'm going to do it." I just don't go through her room any more. She never said, "Stop doing this." But every time I did, she just gave me this look, this withering look. I think that is a fairly petty thing. I wouldn't care if somebody walked through my room whenever. But that sort of thing I have learned to be sensitive to--those things I would never think of as being an issue.

Curt became aware that his sense of "public" and "private" space was different from his colleague's. In this case he sensed that his assumptions were understood as invasive by his woman colleague. Furthermore, something that seemed "petty" to him was important to her, and he gained an awareness of differing social values. He needed to become more conscious of his own taken-for-granted behaviors and perceptive of his colleagues' interpretations of them.

> Q: Let's think about walking through your colleague's room and let's try on the concept of territoriality. But I want to expand it. There can be aspects of dealing with the children where you

get a feeling they are already claimed as the territory of your women colleagues. Can you expand on this idea, if you think it's reasonable?

A: Territoriality, I think, is really important, because the man I work with this year, we work with the kids the same way. We are really interested in independence, of shaking them free and making them responsible for their own behavior and making them say, "I am responsible for what I do." So if I see a kid in the hall, it doesn't have to be a kid from my home room. I'll say, "Are you in the right place?"Who's your teacher?"

But there are teachers I know I could not do that with.

I would just walk away, because they wouldn't respect, whatever I did would be wrong. This kid is her kid, and she wants to discipline him or do whatever. Whatever I do would be interfering So there is a territorial sense there with certain classroom teachers. I don't think it happens in junior high and especially not in high school.

Q: Would you expect a male colleague to respond the same way?"

A: No. I would expect him to say, "You saw the problem, you deal with it. Don't bring it to me."

Q: You don't feel that the woman even wants you to bring it to her?

A: Generally not, because it is infringing on her territory.

Q: Okay, so we have territory in the classroom as a possibility. These are my things and this is my place.

A: Right, and these are my kids!

Some men perceived different assumptions on the part of their women colleagues about the sphere or scope of responsibility entailed in doing the job of elementary teaching. What some women defined as responsible and professional behavior, these men interpreted as territoriality and possessiveness. What men saw as unimportant or obviously reasonable behavior, some of their women colleagues understood as important and obtrusive.

I asked Steve, a Talented and Gifted Program specialist, to comment on Curt's perception of territorial conflict. Women teachers, he suggested, define their responsibility for their students differently from men, and this underlies differing spheres of personal responsibility.

> Q: I have heard from other male teachers that they sometimes sense women teachers are almost territorial with their children [Sure.] In ways that they don't think men are. Comment on that.
>
> A: I would agree on that very much. And to put it in that term "territorial" really puts it into focus. I'm the ultimate intrusion on the territory in many cases and am taking some of their best students. On the other hand, I also take some of the biggest problem students out, so then it's kind of a relief for them too. I can think of male elementary teachers that I work with where I'll be taking kids out of their home room, and it's much easier. They'll say "Hey, you know, whenever." "Pull them out, and don't worry about it." I guess I had never thought about it as "territoriality," but yeah.
>
> Q: Some people might think that the ease with which men relinquish their students is a sign that they're not really committed to the work, and they don't really give a damn. What other explanations could you offer for the difference between your invasion on men and women?
>
> A: I think back to some old sociology classes and I guess I think more of the situation where traditionally boys are socialized by athletics into teamwork and the whole idea of group sports. I think a male teacher may be more likely to say, "Okay, this is the <u>big picture</u> of education. Who cares where the skill is coming from, especially with the students that I've got?" I think that one male teacher in particular says "Hey, they've got the basics down. Take them, and do whatever you can, and then I've got that much more time that I can work with other students. Then I can really focus in on that." I think there is a different picture of how things work. Where I think a male elemenatry teacher is likely to say, "They are going to get it. They are going to pick it up eventually." Whereas a female teacher says, "This is <u>my</u> responsibility to do this and to make sure that everybody," you know, "by God

they'll do this when they leave." So I think that is a big, big difference.

Many of the men interviewed extended these differing understandings of responsibility to other aspects of the teacher's role. They perceived men and women differing on curricular goals--what should be taught--with women insistent on particulars and their own personal responsibility for their students' achievement, while men defined students' learning in terms of broader cognitive and affective goals, with more optimism in school's cumulative effectiveness. In discipline, too, some men noticed women's greater attention to rules and fine points of student behavior, whereas they felt themselves more "laid back" and focused on general principles of character, especially students' own responsibility for discerning appropriate behavior with less punctilious attention to rules. They pointed out the irony of men being hired as disciplinarians, but women being more consistent and attentive to it.

These perceptions of differences in principle, in interactional styles, and in definition of the work put men in conflict with some women colleagues, conflict that men needed to resolve in order to survive on the job.

In "Teaching and Women's Work," Michael Apple (1988) describes a transformation in the nature of jobs as women become the majority of those employed to do them. Mutually reinforcing patriarchy and bureaucratic "top-down" management transform the work, "de-skilling," rationalizing and intensifying it. Apple, who is at pains to avoid fatalistic determinism and "imposition" descriptions of the struggle to control women's work, asserts contradictions and women's resistance. But he has few specifics to offer to illustrate women's day-to-day resistance or acquiescence to this transformation of the job.

The experiences of men elementary teachers may illustrate further women's assertion of control over their own work, but in contradictory ways. To some extent, all men in this study described their own resistance to "women's work:" they resisted de-skilling and asserted independent judgment; they were scornful of rationalization and top-down prescribed curricula, articulated, detailed, and standardized; they were impatient with intensification: exact record-keeping, documenting accountability, observance of proliferating and exhaustive rules and procedures which, they felt, distracted from and displaced the school's true goal: "the big picture" of what, to them, schools are for.

In resisting these aspects of "women's work," men experienced conflict with veteran and nominally "successful" women teachers, who had accepted and internalized the institutional definition of teaching-- in fact deskilled, rationalized, intensified--as "professional" behavior. To such women, conservative of the institutional status quo, men's resistance was "unprofessional," and open to censure.

The need to "get along" with women colleagues and challenges to men's legitimacy as elementary teachers were felt especially acutely by men because of their fewness and social isolation within the school. Being "the first" or "the only" man, while it carried advantages, isolated men as tokens. Nor, as we have seen, were natural male alliances with principals necessarily unproblematic. A sense of apartness and isolation was a consequence of the absence of male coworkers, challenges experienced or infered, and men's sense of discomfort with or alienation from the normal social life of women teachers in the elementary setting.

Some men felt excluded and uncomfortable on informal occasions where women socialized and developed friendships. The school lounge was often cited as one focus of these experiences. I asked Bob, one of two men teachers among twenty women, about how the absence of male co-workers affected him.

> A. At the beginning of the day, all the gals go down to the lounge. They have coffee, they sit in the teachers' lounge, and they talk about babies and menstrual cycles and all of this stuff. Well, T. and I are never there. I really have no interest in being there. I'm really very comfortable not being there. Or if it's someone's birthday, they'll have cake down there, so everyone is down there and T. and I are there then. Often times we'll end up in the corner eating the birthday cake, and they are sitting around the table talking about nursing and all these other things. It gives me someone to talk to. If it wasn't for him being there, you know, so many of the topics that they talk about I wouldn't be able to join in on, and they would be embarrassed to talk about because I was there. [You would feel really isolated then?] Right.

Topics of conversation and informal socializing that were a means for women to establish friendships and common interests caused men discomfort and alienated them. Ross was surprised by this in his first year of teaching, when he was the only male faculty member.

The social life of the teachers' lounge provided women teachers opportunities to discover common interests and develop friendships based on them. These informal interactions were a means by which women established themselves as mutually supportive colleagues. Men, however, who found "getting along" a challenge, felt that the teachers' lounge was "women's territory." They were uncomfortable with the intimacy of conversational topics. They felt that their presence interrupted women's conversations, and that their presence was an intrusion.

The same was true of social occasions outside of school, where women teachers gathered. Several men commented on their discomfort with baby or wedding showers, equally felt whether they attended or declined.

Social opportunities which women felt comfortable sharing, men felt foreclosed to them. And not only was this opportunity to demonstrate their willingness to be amenable and "get along" uncomfortable for them, but their unwillingness to join in could be misconstrued. Bob told of his first year at a school where there was a before-school "coffee klatch." He felt uncomfortable joining the women in this daily workplace ritual. Halfway through the year his woman principal confronted him on what she interpreted as his aloofness and unfriendliness.

> My principal asked me why I wasn't in the lounge in the morning. She wondered why I was so antisocial. She put a lot of connotations on it that weren't in my mind or my feelings whatsoever. She really misunderstood. [What kinds of connotations?] That I didn't want to be there, that I was rejecting their friendship, somehow I didn't like them, because I didn't take part in that conversation in the mornings.

Men's discomfort on these occasions and unwillingness to intrude could be understood as unwillingness to "get along."

A consequence of women's perception of men teachers as unwilling to accommodate themselves to the social norms of the workplace, as defined by women, was further isolation and exclusion from networks of important information and collective decision-making. Considering the importance of cooperation which men perceived in elementary teaching, isolation or shunning by women colleagues made their work more difficult, if not impossible. Curt explained this.

> I was going to get into grapevines and networks, and if you're not part of a network you just don't find things out. Every work situation has a grapevine. The gatekeeper -- usually the secretary is the gatekeeper and its always a woman. If you are a male you really aren't on that grapevine. So in order to be in that decision making process I am willing to try to be a part of the network.
>
> Q. So if you don't get along and behave in ways that are going to include you in the network then you are isolated and not included in decisions that affect your work. [Right.]
>
> Q. You said earlier that when you came into teaching, as a man, if you are not sensitive to your colleagues, your edges get ground off. Would you help me understand how that process takes place and what events might occur?
>
> A. People stop talking when you walk down the hallway. You find out a couple of weeks later a piece of information that somebody could easily have told you. You have a real lousy parent conference or are surprised by a field trip. You look and feel stupid (Curt, fifth and sixth grade teacher).

With men teachers challenged to accommodate themselves to social norms and behaviors defined by women as the majority of their co-workers, challenged to "get along," and with informal social occasions open to women uncomfortable or foreclosed for them, how then did men negotiate the need to fit into the workplace and earn the acquiescence and cooperation of their women colleagues? Men revealed several strategies to meet the challenges posed by their women colleagues whom they perceived as gatekeepers to their success. They arranged exchanges and a complementary division of labor; they consciously silenced themselves and withdrew from any confrontation or controversy; they made what were to them unusual efforts to "be nice" by adopting new and reassuring behaviors; and they signalled deference in a variety of ways.

Together men teachers' relationships with their male principals and with their women colleagues illustrate gender as an important variable in the social milieu of the school as workplace and as key to understanding structures of power and control. Men as tokens or a small minority perceived challenges to their legitimacy, posed by women colleagues, who had the power to define norms of teaching behavior and the social life of the faculty. Men realized, in some

cases for the first time, the experience of "being in a minority." Survival in this situation of gendered power required developing awareness of male stereotypical characteristics and conscious public demonstrations of deference and abdication of privilege.

Both in relations with male principals and female co-workers, men revealed contradictory experiences of power rather than simple privilege or advantage. Schools have been called "patriarchal" institutions, suggesting men's power to define and control women's work (Strober and Tyack, 1981, Acker, 1983; Apple, 1990). However, this concept of "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 1987) in the abstract may not adequately describe the experiences of individual men in particular social situations. While patriarchy or hegemony shapes others' expectations of men's behaviors, the men we have been listening to in fact experience powerlessness, dependence, or the need to accommodate control over their lives and work exercised both by women and by other men. If power in patriarchies is associated with maleness, these men are exceptional in feeling the need to moderate or disown personal power in order to survive challenges both from their male superiors and female co-workers.

Gender as "the absent presence" (Apple) in our understanding of schools becomes clearer when we discover to what extent it shapes and is in fact a part of "the work" for men of being an elementary teacher. In negotiating gendered structures of power and control in the elementary school, men are conscious that they "do" gender, "work at" constructing masculinities shaped by and constrained by the social milieu.

In discussing men elementary teachers' alleged "advantages" in the work place, I have tried to show how advantage in hiring is self-limiting, and how being a man doing "women's work" involves complex conflicts. I suggest both as hypotheses to help explain the persistent fewness of men in elementary teaching.

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